

VZCZCXRO8410
PP RUEHDE RUEHDIR
DE RUEHDO #0508 1371303
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 171303Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY DOHA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6619
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 0370
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS 1225
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1311

C O N F I D E N T I A L DOHA 000508

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/16/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [QA](#)

SUBJECT: QATAR "FIFTY-FIFTY" ON SUPPORT FOR HARIRI TRIBUNAL

Derived from: DSCG 05-1, B,D.

¶1. (C) Assistant Minister Mohamed al-Rumaihi, who holds the MFA's UN portfolio, told the Ambassador May 17 that Qatar was "fifty-fifty" on supporting the Hariri assassination tribunal. He said the tribunal was "important to approve," but then outlined reasons why Qatar believes the decision should not be taken now. He said Lebanon is at a critical moment, with the parliament frozen and the PM not recognizing the president. Civil war could not be ruled out. "Is Hariri more important than Lebanon's security and stability?" he asked.

¶2. (C) Rumaihi said that Qatar was "not opposed to pressure on Syria," but he pointed to November as a better time to approve the tribunal. Lebanon's presidential election is scheduled for that month, and the resulting new government could approve the tribunal prior to a UN Security Council decision." Rumaihi believes that postponing a decision until November does not necessarily reduce pressure on Damascus.

¶3. (C) Regarding Qatar's decision process, Rumaihi said both the MFA and its mission in New York would provide opinions to the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani, who would also have his own views.

Amir's visit to Damascus

¶4. (C) Ambassador questioned Rumaihi regarding the Amir's visit to Damascus, which took place immediately after the May 15 Gulf Security Council meeting in Riyadh. Rumaihi said the trip was "not for love," but was based on a need to understand Syrian thinking. "This is regional politics; we have to deal with everybody," he said. He added that the trip was not meant to counter U.S. policies in the region -- but it was intended to "show the Saudis that we have relations with Syria." He attempted to justify President al-Asad's two visits to Doha in December 2006: "When you send 100 invitations (to the Asian Games), only the bullshitters come."

Comment

¶5. (C) Rumaihi may have claimed that Qatar was "fifty-fifty" on the tribunal decision, but he outlined only the reasons not to support the tribunal now. Given Qatar's apparent policy of seeking a role in Lebanon and antagonizing the Saudis by cozying up to the Syrians, evidenced most recently by the Amir's visit to Damascus, we believe that a yes vote on the tribunal is highly unlikely. An abstention is possible, but the Qataris could also vote against using the argument of bad timing, as they did on the Iran resolution

of July 31 2006.
UNTERMEYER